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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 001391

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SUBJECT: RTG VIEWS ON NEXT STEPS ON BURMA

REF: STATE 20000

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Ambassador raised reftel points with outgoing MFA Permanent Secretary Krit Garnjana-Goonchorn, who offered no substantive response. However, in meetings at the working level, MFA Director of East Asian Division II Kallayana Vipattipumiprates suggested former President of the Philippines General Fidel Ramos, and former Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kwan Yu as highly desirable candidates for the position of UN Special Envoy to Burma. Despite having seemed supportive of former Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari in a prior meeting, Kallayana recanted, claiming the general sentiment among ASEAN members was that the person holding this position should be Asian. Kallayana also provided an update on the Salween dam projects and welcomed the ILO agreement with Burma reached earlier in the week. End summary.

RTG RESPONSE TO USG MESSAGE ON BURMA

¶2. (C) The Ambassador discussed points in reftel regarding next steps on Burma with outgoing MFA Permanent Secretary Krit Garnjana-Goonchorn on March 7. Krit took note of the points but offered no substantive response. On March 2, drawing on reftel points, we told East Asian Affairs Division II Director Kallayana Vipattipumiprates that Burma remains a high priority for the USG. We encouraged the Thai to engage members of ASEAN and beyond in support of a strong Special Envoy to Burma and to continue placing a spotlight on Burma in various UN venues. We emphasized that the RTG should encourage Burma to take credible steps toward reform, such as the release of political prisoners, including Aung Sann Suu Kyi (ASSK). In the March 2 meeting, as in a February 26 meeting when we made similar points, Kallayana said that the RTG continued to press the government of Burma on progress in the area of national reconciliation and the movement toward democratization.

RTG THOUGHTS ON THE UN SPECIAL ENVOY

¶3. (C) We first solicited Thai views on potential candidates for the position of Special Envoy on February 26. At this time, Kallayana mentioned that Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari, in a meeting with Thai diplomats in New York, had mentioned that he might be picked for the position of Special Envoy to Burma because of the confidence he already enjoyed with the regime.

¶4. (C) Kallayana suggested that when a new envoy would be selected, this person should be someone the regime will be comfortable working with. He said because the leadership in Burma only had military education and experience, candidates with a military background would be preferred. Kallayana said Philippine former President Ramos could be considered, although Kallayana worried that, at 79, he might be too old. Kallayana saw Lee Kuan Yew as someone the GOB listened to and respected in the past. (Note: Kallayana did not mention whether the RTG had sounded out either Ramos or Lee to ascertain their interest in the Special Envoy position. End Note.) Kallayana also mentioned Gambari as someone the GOB was comfortable working with, and who has been received at the highest levels during one of his two prior visits to Burma.

¶5. (C) In a follow-on meeting on March 2, Kallayana had clearly given further thought to the question and been in touch with other ASEAN members (NFI). In this conversation, he said the Special Envoy should not be an African, European or even come from Latin America. In his words, "the person should be Asian." He also said that the Special Envoy must enjoy the trust and confidence of the GOB leadership, specifically Than Shwe and Maung Aye. He said, "talking to Prime Minister Soe Win will not yield results."

SALWEEN DAM PROJECTS

¶6. (C) Kallayana said that the RTG recently had an internal meeting chaired by Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) to discuss the Salween river dam projects. He said the feasibility studies were about to be completed for the Hat Gyi dam in Kayin State. After the release of the

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feasibility study, the RTG would look for a source to cover the budget. He said the source of budget would be discussed with Burma's Ministry of Electric Power. He mentioned that China would like to participate in this project also. Kallayana noted that the Tasang dam's completion would mean over 7000 Megawatts of production, supervised by the private sector. Kallayana offered no substantive response when we raised the environmental and population issues associated with these projects.

ILO AGREEMENT

¶7. (C) The RTG welcomed the recent agreement reached between the ILO and the government of Burma. Kallayana pointed out that this was particularly noteworthy since it marked a clear response by the GOB to calls for cooperation from ASEAN and other members of the international community.
BOYCE